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SOME REFLECTIONS ON ZURVANISM¹

By MARY BOYCE

FROM the studies of Zurvanism made in this century, a large measure of agreement has been reached. It is accepted that Zurvan 'est en général le dieu du firmament lumineux et étoilé . . . avant tout le dieu du sort . . . en général regardé comme un dieu quadriforme'²; and that his cult was 'enraciné surtout dans l'Iran occidental'.³ But a fundamental disagreement has developed over the origin of Zurvanism. H. S. Nyberg, although pointing out scrupulously that 'le mythe zervanite n'est directement attesté que dans le mazdéisme',⁴ and that 'nous ne trouvons jamais un système zervanite où Ormuzd ne soit représenté',⁵ has nevertheless maintained that Zurvan is an ancient Iranian god, whose cult, older than Zoroaster, has been partly adopted into, and partly obliterated by, orthodox Mazdeism. In this he has been followed by a number of scholars. Another school of thought, numbering among its adherents Cumont and Schaeder, has recently had its views concisely restated by W. B. Henning. In his words, 'Zervanism, with its speculations on Time, its apparatus of numbers, and the idea of the world-year, is the outcome of contact between Zoroastrianism and the Babylonian civilization. It originated in the second half of the Achaemenian period'.⁶ There is general agreement that in the Sasanian period Zurvanites and Mazdeans formed two branches of the Zoroastrian church, rather than two opposing faiths.

In his massive new contribution to the subject,⁷ R. C. Zaehner, confining himself to Zurvanism in Sasanian times, does not commit himself definitely on the question of its origins.⁸ To a kindred problem, however, he offers a clearly stated solution. This problem is raised by the fact that foreign sources for the late Achaemenian and Sasanian periods represent Persian Zoroastrianism as Zurvanite, whereas the native texts (almost all composed after the Muslim conquest) embody a predominately Mazdean orthodoxy. Both Nyberg⁹ and

¹ With particular reference to R. C. Zaehner's *Zurvân, a Zoroastrian dilemma*. xvi, 495 pp. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955. 84s.

² H. S. Nyberg, 'Questions de cosmogonie et de cosmologie mazdéennes', *JA*, 1931, 2, 107-8.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*, 81.

⁵ *ibid.*, 113.

⁶ W. B. Henning, *Zoroaster, politician or witch-doctor?*, London, 1951, 49.

⁷ This splendidly produced volume is admirably set out, with glossaries and full index, and I would criticize its form only for the absence of individual page-headings in part II, which would have made it easier to find references in the texts.

⁸ The book is clearly the work of years (Professor Zaehner's first work on the subject, incorporated here, was published in *BSOS*, ix, 2, 1938, 303-20; ix, 3, 1938, 573-85; ix, 4, 1939, 871-901; see also *ibid.*, x, 2, 1940, 377-98; x, 3, 1940, 606-31). It is perhaps legitimate to distinguish in it, therefore, different stages of thought. Thus in chapters I-III Zurvanism is treated as a Zoroastrian heresy, influenced by Babylonian speculation, and coming into its own only with the Sasanian empire; but in the later chapters the author inclines more and more to the belief that it is an old pre-Zoroastrian Iranian cult, existing in its own right. In the Introduction he treats it once more as a 'major heresy', a reaction against Zoroastrian dualism; and this is presumably his final judgment.

⁹ See *op. cit.*, 70-1.

Christensen¹ became convinced that Zurvanism was in fact the state-religion of the Sasanians, and the latter explained its rejection in the post-conquest epoch as due to a reform in the face of Islam, aimed at establishing a new and stronger orthodoxy and freeing the faith from 'l'idée de Zurvân avec toute la mythologie puérile qui s'y rattachait'.² Zaehner agrees with Bidez and Cumont in their rejection of 'cette hypothèse hardie d'une réforme profonde, mais tardive, dont la tradition des Parsis n'a conservé aucun souvenir',³ and himself offers an explanation based on a theory of von Wesendonk's,⁴ namely that the two schools of Zoroastrianism dominated alternately during the Sasanian period, Mazdeism being triumphant at the vital epoch of the forming of the Zoroastrian canon, that is, during the reign of Xusrau I. Zaehner's exposition is persuasively vigorous and clear, and has already been welcomed as providing 'the royal highway to the solution of the riddle'.⁵ But I myself must confess to doubts.

Briefly summarized, his interpretation is as follows: Zoroastrianism was established as the state-religion by Ardašir. 'Any definition of theological dogma would at this stage have been premature' (p. 36). His son Šapur showed interest in various religions, including Manichaeism, whose links with Zurvanism have often been noted; and he may have supported Zurvanism, and given it scriptural authority, by introducing 'foreign matter akin to already current Zervanite ideas' (p. 38), i.e. works on 'astronomy, time, and space, the process of becoming, decay, and "alteration"' (p. 37). Under Bahram I persecution was unleashed against the Manichaeans, and also the Zandīks, with whom Zaehner now identifies one group of the Zurvanites (p. 38). This policy was vigorously pursued by Kartir, 'the period of (whose) power, extending through the reigns of the first three Bahrāms . . . can then be regarded as the period of the first victory of Mazdean orthodoxy' (p. 38). Backsliding in the succeeding reigns is suggested by the convening of a council under Šapur II, at which the high-priest Adurbad was required to vindicate his own beliefs by ordeal. His success led to a royal edict establishing these beliefs as the true faith, and 'the reign of Šāpūr II may thus be regarded as the high-water mark of orthodox Mazdeanism' (p. 39). Conformity was savagely enforced till the reign of Yazdegird I, who showed a spirit of tolerance. Towards the end of his reign Mihr-Narsē became *wazurg framadār*, and Zaehner argues convincingly (pp. 40-7) that he was a Zurvanite, and that accordingly Zurvanism was the predominant religion during the reign of his next master, Yazdegird II, also. Under Kawad religious speculation became rife, but orthodoxy was re-established by Xusrau I, who sought, however, later in his reign, to find a middle way between 'the

¹ See A. Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides*, second edition, 150.

² *ibid.*, 437.

³ J. Bidez and F. Cumont, *Les Mages hellénisés*, I, p. 63, n. 3.

⁴ O. G. von Wesendonk, *Das Wesen der Lehre Zarathuštrōs*, Leipzig, 1927, 19-20.

⁵ See J. Duchesne-Guillemin, 'Notes on Zervanism in the light of Zaehner's *Zurvân*, with additional references', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, xv, 1956, 108.

rival schools of Mazdeanism and Zervanism' (p. 48). It is to him, Zaehner thinks, that we owe the presence of Zurvanite elements in the Pahlavi books. 'The attempted fusion . . . was not complete; and it is thanks to his failure that we can reconstruct the Zervanite system at all' (p. 48). After his reign came decline, and the last important ruler, Xusrau II, was possibly a Christian, and certainly a dabbler in astrology and sorcery.

Zaehner thus sees Zurvanism and Mazdeism as alternating with a fairly steady pendulum-motion throughout the period. His evidence has been carefully culled, and for the Zurvanite periods seems to me convincing. For the times of Mazdean orthodoxy I find it on the contrary doubtful, and invalidated to a large extent by being marshalled in the light of two hazardous assumptions. These are (1) that Zurvanism, because it contained non-Iranian elements, was still, at the time of Šapur I, a 'largely alien religion' (p. 37); and (2) that Zurvanism, because it arose through a certain eclecticism, was *and remained* liberal in outlook. Hence, times of xenophobia and persecution are interpreted as times of orthodoxy, and times of liberalism as Zurvanite. But can this really be justified? Zurvanism is known to have existed among Iranians in late Achaemenian times; by the Sasanian period it had had, therefore, at least 600 years to establish itself as a native religion, and to consolidate its doctrines. The likelihood is that by that time it was quite as capable as Mazdeism of intolerance and nationalism. There is indeed evidence that this was so, for the Syrian Acts show that the Christian martyrs, who suffered partly for their religion, partly for their connexion with Byzantium, endured at the hands of *Zurvanite* persecutors.¹ It seems likely that in this respect there was little to choose between either branch of Zoroastrianism, and that the ascendancy of one or the other had nothing to do with liberalism or the reverse, but depended simply on influence over the throne.

Let us re-examine the evidence in this light. Kartir is regarded by Zaehner as a Mazdean, and thereby the orthodoxy of four kings (Hormizd I and Bahram I, II, and III) is established. But Kartir rose to prominence under the putatively Zurvanite Šapur, and hardly sounds the man to change his doctrines with his prince. Nor is there anything in his inscriptions to prove his orthodoxy. As Zaehner points out, Kartir 'is interested in reviving the characteristic aspects of Zoroastrian religious practice which were almost certainly common to Mazdeans and Zervanites' (p. 25), and as an 'enthusiastic religious imperialist' (*ibid.*) he might, in my opinion, have promulgated the teachings of either group. There is one point alone (apart from his persecuting zeal) which Zaehner finds to adduce for his Mazdeism, and that is his concern to establish belief in the hereafter, with reward and punishment for virtue and vice. The argument is as follows: Mas'udi (*Muruj*, II, 168) states that the Zandiks of Islamic times believed in the eternity of matter and denied the creation of the world. Zaehner seeks to connect these beliefs with those held by the victims of Kartir's persecution. Similar views were held by the Dahrīs,

¹ This point has been emphasized by Nyberg, *op. cit.*, 68–71.

with whom Zaehner now wishes to identify the *materialist* school of Zurvanites.¹ (For his former opinion, which I find the more convincing, that the Dahrīs were distinct from the Zurvanites, see *BSOS*, ix, 4, 1939, 900.) He accordingly proposes to identify the Zandiks described by Mas'udi with the Dahrīs, and both with the materialist Zurvanites of the third century. *Ergo*, Kartir persecuted Zurvanites, and cannot therefore have been a member of their body. But even were the proposition allowed, and it were admitted as proved that Kartir persecuted materialist Zurvanites, the deduction appears hardly sound, since there is nothing in the evidence to exclude Kartir from the *ethical* Zurvanites, who appear to have been the better-known and more influential.

I can find no convincing proof offered either for the orthodoxy of 'the redoubtable Ādurbāδ' (p. 39). There is inferential evidence in that the orthodox books celebrate his vindication of the faith, and that in one passage of the *Dinkard*, the least Zurvanite of texts, this work is said to have been handed down in his family for five or six generations.² This latter testimony is of small value, however, so many more generations having passed between Adurbad's own lifetime and the composition of the book. Similarly, the 'Sayings of Adurbad' are hardly evidence, for their attribution is presumably no more than an acknowledgment of his lasting fame.³ To argue from his fame to his orthodoxy is risky. Šapur I, considered to have Zurvanite leanings, has a distinguished place beside him in the *Dinkard*,⁴ and it is probable that the later Zoroastrians celebrated, without regard to sect, all who in the remote past had upheld their faith. Moreover, there is contemporary evidence, in the Syrian *Acts of Pūsai*,⁵ for the Zurvanism of Adurbad's patron, Šapur II, which makes it difficult to regard his reign as 'the high-water mark of orthodox Mazdeanism'.

The witness of Mār Abhā casts similar doubt on the orthodoxy of the times of Xusrau I.⁶ That Xusrau was a 'harsh xenophobe' (p. 50) and intolerant of heresy tells us nothing of his attitude to Zurvanism, the religion of several at least of his forefathers. If, moreover, we agree with Zaehner that the *Šahname* 'expounds views which seem to be an epitome of popular Zervanite doctrine',⁷

¹ For further discussion of this, see Zaehner, 'Postscript to *Zurvān*', *BSOAS*, xvii, 2, 1955, 234-7.

² *DkM*, 946.12; Zaehner, p. 12 and n. 3.

³ I find it slightly puzzling that Zaehner points in one place (p. 181) to the Zurvanite character of *andarz* literature, and in another (p. 12) takes it as a proof of orthodoxy that collections of *andarz* were attributed to Adurbad and Xusrau.

⁴ *DkM*, 412.17.

⁵ See O. Braun, *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, 66-7; Zaehner, 432.

⁶ Zaehner, 437.

⁷ *ibid.*, 241-6. Were it merely a question of a pervasively fatalistic outlook, one might be inclined to attribute this, with Zaehner, to Firdausi's own time, or even to regard it as expressive of the heroic attitude in general (see H. Ringgren, *Fatalism in Persian Epics*, Uppsala, 1952, 47). But Zaehner bases his argument on one particular passage, first cited in this connexion by I. F. Blue, in *Indo-Iranian studies . . . in honour of . . . Peshotan Sanjana*, London, 1925, 61-2, where Zal is questioned by the Mobads. Zurvanism is here a matter of content, not interpretation, and can therefore be safely attributed to the Sasanian period. Zaehner's suggestion (p. 241) that Firdausi 'must have been conversant with the more popular Pahlavi religious texts' seems to me hazardous. The evidence cited can readily be explained as an example of traditionally-expressed gnomic lore.

then here is a further indication that Zurvanism flourished at the courts of the later Sasanian kings, for the *Xwaday-namaq* emanated evidently from the neighbourhood of the throne. Foreign testimony certainly suggests that Zurvanism was dominant under Hormizd IV and Xusrau Parwez,¹ and this brings us virtually to the end of the period. Thus there seems a lack of proof for the Mazdeism of *any* Sasanian king ; and this, given the attested Zurvanism of some of the royal family, is surely what we should, *a priori*, expect. For, allowance made for private divergencies, and individual vagaries such as Kawad's, it is likely that the state religion would remain unchanged from generation to generation. One has only to reflect, for example, on the upheavals attendant on a single change of sect by the English monarchy, to feel doubtful of a theory involving regular alterations in their adherence by the Persian kings.

If we accept that Zurvanism was the royal religion throughout the period, we are left with the problem of its almost complete disappearance thereafter. As to Christensen's theory, one is certainly entitled to doubt whether the Zoroastrian church would have had, in the desperate days following the conquest, the necessary strength or cohesion for a deliberate reform. Moreover, his supposition implies a criticism of Zurvanism as a decadent and enervating faith ; but it would be strange if this had been suddenly realized by the Zurvanite clergy, after so many centuries had established their worship, and linked it with imperial power.

Consideration of the problem is hampered by our ignorance of the relationship between Zurvanism and Mazdeism. We do not know, and it hardly seems likely that we shall ever know, whether in Sasanian times the two groups represented two sects, such as Catholic and Lutheran, with the separate organization which that implies, or simply two tendencies within one church, such as high and low church in Anglicanism. On the one hand, as Nyberg has pointed out, true Zoroastrianism, with its basic optimism, is ' foncièrement anti-zervanite '.² On the other, the incompatibilities of doctrine hardly seem so deep that they could not have been reconciled under the broad aegis of an imperial church. Be that as it may, it seems possible that the true explanation of the eclipse of Zurvanism after the conquest lies in the regionalism of the two branches of Zoroastrianism. The Manichaean evidence suggests that in the third century Zurvanism was dominant in the south-west of the Empire, Mazdeism among the Parthians.³ This gives support to what is an inherent probability, namely that orthodox Zoroastrianism remained strongest in those regions

¹ See the treatise by Mār bar Ḥadbešabbā, Zaehner, 439 ff.

² *op. cit.*, 117.

³ Zaehner (p. 29) cites in this connexion Ehiš's account of the divisions of the Magi, which includes the *palhavik* and *parskaden* ; but according to Darmesteter, these terms refer to texts (*zand* and *nirangistan*), not to local schools (see his *Zend-Avesta*, III, p. xciv, n. 3). Despite the Manichaean evidence, G. Widengren has strongly urged that it was among the *Parthians* that Zurvanism flourished, and not among the Persians (see his 'Stand und Aufgaben der iranischen Religions geschichte', *Numen*, II, 1/2, 1955, 89 ff., 102 ff.).

nearest Zoroaster's homeland, and farthest from Babylonian and Greek influences, i.e. in northern and eastern Iran.¹ These regions being remote also from the foreign observers of Sasanian times, it is not surprising that they should have been screened from their notice by the Zurvanites of the west. At the Muslim conquest their position enabled these areas to hold out longest, and to remain the strongholds of the old religion. It would be natural, therefore, for their priests gradually to acquire a new authority over the decimated church, an authority which would in itself, in my opinion, account for a change of doctrine as expressed in official expositions of the faith. It is hardly surprising, however, if in these there was a failure wholly to obliterate the Zurvanite doctrines so long established and powerfully supported. That Zurvanism continued for centuries among groups of 'common persons' is suggested by a passage in Mas'udi.²

In addition to consolidating previous work on the subject, Zaehner offers original theories in his interpretation of Zurvanite doctrine. These he puts forward with courageous clarity, coupled with a good-humoured detachment, and a plea for their consideration at the bar of objective opinion (p. 265). This generous appeal can hardly be ignored; and in trying to respond to it, one can only regret that assent permits of such brief expression, whereas dissent needs disproportionate space to justify itself.

Zaehner's discussion of *yātūkīh* (pp. 13–17), which he identifies with *dēwāsnīh*, is illuminating, and his attribution to this cult of the sacrifice to Areimanios described by Plutarch carries conviction. In setting out the Zurvanite myth as preserved by foreign writers, he suggests (pp. 64–5) a new and seemly interpretation of the name of Zurvan's consort, namely **xʷaš-xʷarrīγ*, 'whose fortune is fair', based on the manuscript reading *xwšwryg*. He also offers (pp. 66–9) an interesting solution for another puzzle, in suggesting that the *barsom* handed to Ohrmazd by Zurvan, according to Eznik, was a symbol, not of royalty but of priesthood: that Ahriman received, according to promise, kingship, Ohrmazd priesthood, 'so that he could by virtue of sacrifice bring the power of Ahriman to naught' (p. 69). Zaehner further examines (pp. 72 ff.) the statement in the *'Ulemā i Islām* that Ohrmazd and Ahriman were formed by Zurvan from fire and water, a statement linked by Bousset with a passage from Hippolytus, according to which the Magians admitted two principles, the father, light, the mother, darkness. Zaehner suggests that we have here a school of 'dissident Zervanism' (p. 77) which had a materialistic interpretation of the universe. In his Retrospect (pp. 267 ff.) he suggests that this school represented 'the true Zervanite view' embodying 'a system that is seemingly neither Zoroastrian nor Iranian', but this he does not develop consistently

¹ Such sectarian regionalism can, of course, last for centuries in much smaller countries than Iran. In the United Kingdom, for example, we have Anglicanism dominant in the south, Presbyterianism in the north, Methodism in Wales, and Roman Catholicism in the south of Ireland. For Iran there remains the fact of Zurvan's name being used to translate Brahma's in Sogdiana.

² *Kitābu't-Tanbīh*, ed. de Goeje, 93, transl. Carra de Vaux, 134; Zaehner, 443.

through the book, and for those who regard Zurvanism as a Zoroastrian heresy the argument is hard to follow. His analysis makes it seem very likely, however, that there were different schools of Zurvanite thought, influenced to different degrees by Babylonian or Greek speculation.

With Zaehner's fourth chapter we leave behind the comparative clarity of hostile foreign witnesses, and follow him in the 'delicate task' of interpreting the Pahlavi sources, which add to their natural obscurities the difficulties of being, putatively, either orthodox works into which Zurvanite ideas have crept, or Zurvanite works rewritten by orthodox hands. Here the field for speculation is clearly great, and the difficulty of establishing or refuting theories considerable.

One of the cardinal points made by Zaehner at the beginning of his book is that 'in selecting Zurvān to represent the Father of Greatness the Manichaeans were evidently struck by that inaccessibility and aloofness from the cosmic conflict which was characteristic of their own supreme deity' (pp. 21-2). This contemporary evidence is clearly of the greatest importance for showing how Zurvan was regarded by his worshippers in the third century. It is not irreconcilable with Zaehner's 'two recorded instances in which Zurvān as a personal god interferes in the affairs of the Universe' (p. 238), for one of these takes place before the creation of the world, the other before the creation of man. At the same remote epoch the Manichaean Father of Greatness had also a limited activity. For these two interventions there is, moreover, good textual authority.¹ Further, as god of Fate, Zurvan was evidently regarded as presiding, however remotely, over the 'phases de la vie terrestre',² hence his epithets *frašōqar*, *ašōqar*, *zarōqar*.³ Zaehner goes further than this, however, maintaining that during the Sasanian period Zurvan was made to abandon altogether his position as '*deus otiosus*, présidant à la création',⁴ and to become involved directly in the here and now. This he supposes to have come about through a series of identifications of Zurvan with other gods, identifications which require careful consideration.

One identification is with the god Vāy. Here we are at once on controversial ground, since the theory, supported by distinguished scholars, that Vāy had, at one stage or another,⁵ been split into two gods, beneficent and maleficent,

¹ *Zātspram*, 2.19, 34.35; Zaehner, pp. 247, n. D, 346.

² Nyberg, *op. cit.*, 90.

³ See H. H. Schaeder, *Urform und Fortbildungen des manichäischen Systems*, 141-2; Nyberg, *op. cit.*, 84 ff.; E. Benveniste, 'Le témoignage de Théodore bar Kônay sur le zoroastrisme', *MO*, xxvi, 1932, 177 ff.; H. W. Bailey, 'Indo-Iranian studies', *Trans. Phil. Soc.*, 1935, 27-8; Zaehner, 219 ff.

⁴ Nyberg, *op. cit.*, 126. Nyberg has latterly come to believe that 'der Zervanismus ist die besondere Ausgestaltung der alten medischen Religion vor der Ankunft des Zoroastrismus' (see his *Die Religionen des alten Iran*, transl. by H. H. Schaeder, Leipzig, 1938, 388) and that Zurvan became a *deus otiosus* only after his Median cult had come into contact with the Zoroastrian worship of Ahura Mazda (ibid., 386).

⁵ Thus Nyberg attributes the cleavage of Vayu to the Zoroastrian period, whereas G. Dumézil would set it at an earlier stage (see his *Tarpeia*, Paris, 1947, 74 ff.; *Les dieux des indo-européens*, Paris, 1952, 84-9).

has not won general assent. Zaehner accepts this theory, and seeks to establish the identification, during Sasanian times, of Zurvan with *both* Vāys.¹ His arguments, briefly summarized, are as follows: (1) Vāy i vēh is conceived as the atmosphere, hence space. Space and time are so closely connected that they can be identified (p. 88). (2) Vāy i vattar is a god of death. In Vd. 19.29 the paths to the Činvat bridge, followed by departed spirits, are called *zrvō.dāta* 'created by Zurvān' (p. 87). Some Pahlavi passages connect Zurvan with death (pp. 239–42). (3) Vāy and Zurvan share some epithets. Both are 'just' and 'terrible', and in Ny.1.1. a stock-epithet of Zurvan's (*darəγō.x^vadāta*) is applied to Vayu (pp. 87, 89–90).

The third argument would carry little weight by itself. Against the first it can be objected (by those who do not accept the dichotomy of the god Vāy) that Pahl. *wāy i wēh* is properly no more than a common noun, meaning 'air', hence 'atmosphere, space', and so linked with (but by no means *identified* with) time, without any concept of divinity.² By this interpretation one avoids what Zaehner justly calls 'the quite maddening confusion' (p. 125) caused by introducing the *god* Vāy on the cosmological plane. There then arises, admittedly, the lesser difficulty of explaining those late passages (*MX*, 2. 115; *Gt. Bd.*, 166. 4; *Datestan i denik*, 30.4) in which *wāy i wēh* is presented as the opponent of the god Vāy i vattar; but these seem most likely to owe their origin to confusion on the part of the ninth-century compilers, caused by the existence on the one hand of the conception of a powerful, somewhat sinister god, on the other of the common noun with distinguishing static epithet. As to the second argument, the deduction from the late hapax *zrvō.dāta* is hazardous (if any divine function is to be deduced from it, why not that of the god of

¹ Links have frequently been sought between Zurvan and Vayu, largely because they are invoked together (although in company with other gods) in Ys. 72, 10; Sir. i, 21; ii, 21; Vd. 19, 13; but an obstacle to their close association is created by Zurvan's universally recognized position as *deus otiosus*. Nyberg has met this difficulty firmly by suggesting that, by the period of the younger Avesta at least, Vayu, and θwāša also, were both themselves *dii otiosii* (see his *Die Religionen*, 80), and could therefore 'ohne weiteres mit Zurvān gleichgesetzt und als Aspekte seines Wesens aufgefasst werden. Tatsächlich sind sie auch sehr nahe verwandte östliche Spielformen von ihm' (ibid., 391). Widengren has combated vigorously (and, as it seems to me, with justice) the idea that Vayu was ever a *deus otiosus* (see his *Hochgottglaube im alten Iran*, Uppsala, 1938, 207 ff.), but wishes nevertheless to regard Vayu and Zurvan as aspects of the same god (ibid., 234). In this he seems to me a little inconsequent, seeking as he does to link a remote god of Fate with an active god of war. Zaehner, like Nyberg, attempts to meet the problem squarely, but his solution is to postulate a gradual identification of Zurvan with the more active deity in the period *after* the incontestable Manichaean evidence of the third century. S. Wikander's attempt (*La Nouvelle Clío*, 1950, 310 ff.) to interpret the story of Zal and Rustam as a heroization of the myths of Zurvan and Vayu seems to me an unhappy one; but see K. Barr, *Avesta, oversat og forklaret*, Copenhagen, 1954, 46–7; J. Duchesne-Guillemin, 'La religion iranienne', in É. Drioton and others, *Les religions de l'Orient ancien*, Paris, Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1956, 124.

² It might be tempting to see a parallel to the standing epithet *wēh* in Parthian *ardāw*, applied as constantly, in Manichaean texts, to *fravardīn* 'ether, air', were it not that this usage represents presumably an inherited formula, Av. *ašaonqm fravašinqm*.

Fate ?).¹ Of the Pahlavi passages those containing the word *zurvān* have already been withdrawn by the author (see his 'Postscript to *Zurvān*', *BSOAS*, xvii, 2, 1955, 233), since in them it is clearly used as the common noun 'old age'. Those containing the word *zamān* seem to me open to a similar objection. Phrases occur, the world over, associating relentless time with death, but one would not argue from them to the *identity* of gods controlling the two.

The evidence thus seems to me too weak, in all its branches, for it to be held that the identification of Zurvan with Vāy has been established, or even, I would venture to say, for it to have been shown that there is any particularly close connexion between these two gods. I am reluctant also to follow Zaehner in his further argument (pp. 111–12), that because of the close links between time and space, Zurvan was regarded as having entered into the firmament (*Spihr/θwāša*) as into a body, and that he could therefore be considered as 'incarnate in the universe and as such . . . the origin of all material things, . . . the macrocosm corresponding to man, the microcosm'.² From this Zaehner deduces that Zurvan had 'a distinct affinity with the so-called Primal Man of the Manichees' (p. 113).

Zaehner further finds 'a fusion of the personalities of Zurvan and Ohrmazd' (p. 93), carried so far that at times Zurvan is 'formally identified . . . with Ohrmazd, the Creator', and must therefore 'himself be Creator too' (p. 201). The evidence is largely bound up with Nyberg's controversial theory that there are three creators other than Ohrmazd commemorated in the three days of the month named *Dai*.³ These creators Zaehner believes to be Time, Space, and Wisdom, whose rôle he deduces from a Pahlavi version of the *Sīh-rōzak*, consisting of hymns to the deities presiding over the days of the month (pp. 197 ff.). In each of the four relevant hymns, as Zaehner points out, the creator is 'uncompromisingly Ohrmazd' (p. 199), but he is presented in each 'under a slightly different aspect'. These *aspects*, Zaehner concludes, represent the real Creators; in one case Wisdom, in another Time, i.e. Zurvan. Of the third hymn he says: 'it is addressed to Ohrmazd alone as creator, and no amount of ingenuity can legitimately discover a different deity concealed behind his name in this case'

¹ Nyberg has argued brilliantly (*JA*, 1931, 2, 121–5) for a connexion between the Iranian conception of the *paθqm zrvō.dātanaqm* and the Indian *pitṛyāna*, the Činvat bridge representing the *devayāna*; but whatever the possibilities of a remote common origin for the conceptions, in the developed Iranian mythology as we possess it, *all* souls travel these paths, *after* standing at the judgment-seat. It seems perilous, then, to argue from a single occurrence of an epithet for them, in a late text, that 'Zurvān . . . est le dieu primitif chthonien qui arrache la vie aux êtres humains, le maître du *pitṛyāna*'.

² Zaehner bases his argument largely on difficult textual evidence, in his interpretation of which he appears to me to press correspondences too far. A very similar position has already been claimed for Vayu, as 'die Hauchseele des ganzen Kosmos. Der Kosmos selbst wird als der Körper der Gottheit aufgefasst . . .' (Widengren, *Numen*, I, 1, 19), but this also appears to me of doubtful validity.

³ Nyberg himself brought his theory into connexion with Zurvan, in that he considered this four-fold division of the month to symbolize Zurvan as the 'viergestaltigen Zeitgott' (see *Die Religionen*, 380). Zaehner develops the connexion rather differently, however, by actually introducing Zurvan among the postulated four creators, thus forming a new tetrad.

(p. 201). Yet he draws on another hymn to produce such a deity, namely Space. He apologizes disarmingly for the tenuousness of this (p. 207), but I cannot find that the supporting evidence (pp. 207–14) is adequate to dispel doubt.¹

In short, I remain unpersuaded of the validity of any of the proposed identifications for Zurvan and fail, therefore, to find proof that he abandoned, after the third century, his attested position of remote primal deity, a distant, impersonal god of fate. But this unwillingness to be convinced is undoubtedly due in part to a rejection of theories which are vital to Zaehner's arguments, and which have received wide support.

Zaehner devotes an interesting chapter (pp. 166 ff.) to the demon Āz, in which he draws on Manichaean as well as Pahlavi texts, and makes valuable observations on the Zurvanite ethic and *Weltanschauung*, pointing out how dissimilar this was, in its asceticism and condemnation of desire, from orthodox Mazdeism.² The second part of the chapter (pp. 183–92) is spent on Woman, the Seductress of Man. Here Zaehner follows Benveniste,³ although he appears slightly to misrepresent (p. 188) his conclusion, which is that woman's power to help Ahriman comes from the fact that she 'vient en réalité du monde d'Ohrmazd, d'où sa nature impudique l'a poussée vers la création adverse'.⁴ This is Zaehner's conclusion also. I find it difficult, however, to follow him in the identification (already proposed by him in *BSOAS*, x, 3, 1940, 621–4) of Jēh with a hypothetical First Woman, and the further hypothesis that this First Woman seduced Gayōmard and thereby defiled the human race (pp. 190–1). This conjecture is based partly on a desire for symmetry, which I cannot but think to be misplaced, since the First Man figures in a number of religions as the prototype of *humanity*, not of man as opposed to woman; partly on the evidence of a lacuna in *Zātspram* 34.31. The passage is as follows⁵:

- (30) *pad dēn a'ōn paidāg ku Ahriman, ka andar ō dām dwārist, dušdēn jēh-dēw sardag a'ōn pad hanbāz dāšt čē'ōn mard zan i jēhē hanbašn [bawē]d ; čē x'ad ast dēw jēh ; uš dušdēn jēh-dēw sardag bān[ūk] ab[d]ist, x'ad ast sar i hamāg jēh-dēwān, grān-pityāraktar ō mard i ahlaw.*

¹ The evidence proposed for some of the other tetrads in Ch. ix also seems to me weak; but on p. 214 the author expresses his readiness not to press these particular theories. As for the naming of the three judges as Mihr, Srōš, and Rašn (pp. 102–3), this can hardly be regarded as more than a possibility, owing to the lack of evidence. Their further *identification* with Gayōmard, Jamšid, and Zoroaster ('Postscript', pp. 243–9), I find wholly unconvincing.

² I cannot see that Zaehner has established his case (pp. 174–5) for translating *waran* 'lust' as 'heresy and unbelief'. The facts that *waran* is opposed to reason, associated with self-love and ignorance (*x'ad-dōšagih* and *duš-āgāhik*, here rendered as 'self-will and wrong knowledge'), and that it leads astray, unsettles, and deceives, appear to me to accord admirably with the accepted translation.

³ *MO*, xxvi, 1932, 185–92.

⁴ *ibid.*, 189.

⁵ Zaehner, transliteration and textual notes, *BSOS*, x, 2, 1940, 390; x, 3, 1940, 620–5; transcription, *Zurvān*, 345; translation, *ibid.*, 350–1. The restorations for para. 30, given here in square brackets, are Professor Zaehner's, as is, with minor divergencies, the translation.

- (31) *uš dušdēn i . . . hamyuxt, āhūgēnādan i mādagān rāy abāg hamyuxti hast, ku tā mādagān āhūgēnād, ud āhūgēnādagīh i mādagān rāy narān āhūgēnānd, [ud] az x^eškārīh wartānd.*
- (32) *uš pas wizīd spāhpad[ān] sardār i x^aad . . .*

Now there is nothing in the construction to suggest that para. 31 has a different subject from paras. 30 and 32, and it is therefore natural to suppose that the 'he' referred to in it is Ahriman. If we accept B. T. Anklesaria's simple restoration here of [*jhdyw*], we reach the following translation :

- (30) In the scriptures it is thus revealed, that when Ahriman rushed into the creation, he had the species of the demon Whore of evil religion as companion, even as a man may join a whore-woman. For verily the whore is a demon. And he appointed the demon Jēh of evil religion queen of her species, that is chief of all whore-demons, the most grievous adversary of the just man. (31) And he joined himself with the [demon Whore] of evil religion, for the defilement of females he was joined with (her), that she might defile females, and the females, on account of their defilement, might defile men, and they might turn from their duty. (32) And then he chose his own commander-in-chief . . .

This is consonant with *Gt.Bd.*, 40.13–14, *Ind.Bd.*, 9.6–8, where it is said that the kiss of Ahriman brought defilement, i.e. 'that pollution called menstruation', to Jēh. Zaehner objects that the defilement of a demon could not defile women, and seeks a different version of the myth by emending the passage as follows : (31) *uš dušdēn i [jēh-dēw abāg mard i ahlaw] hamyuxt . . .* 'And [the demon Whore] of evil religion joined herself [to the Blessed Man] . . .'. By the 'Blessed Man' (*mard i ahlaw*) Zaehner understands Gayōmard, and suggests that by this union Jēh transmits her defilement (in his view the sin of concupiscence) to her female offspring, who again by concupiscence defile the males. To this it can be objected (1) there is no other trace of such a myth ; (2) it conflicts with the well-attested myth whereby the seed of Gayōmard is received by Spendarmat ; and (3) the suggested emendation not only introduces an abrupt change of subject, but violates the structure of the sentence, forcing one to leave untranslated the enclitic -š, which can by no means be regarded as a reflexive.

In the course of his study, Zaehner makes incidental reference to Mithraism, whose mysteries 'are Zervanite in so far as they place Kronos-Zurvān at the head of the pantheon' (p. 19). In the body of the book he follows Cumont in identifying the lion-headed deity of Mithraism with Zurvan, but in the preface he retracts this, and agrees with J. Duchesne-Guillemin¹ in seeing in this figure the *deus Arimanius*. This opinion he develops in his 'Postscript' (op. cit., 237–43). His arguments are : (1) That the lion-headed statue is always encircled by a snake, and that lion and snake 'together represent the entire

¹ See his *Ohrmazd et Ahriman*, Paris, 1953, 128.

brute-creation of Ahriman'. This I find a trifle over-stated, especially in view of the fact that the *karpunak* (Av. *kahrpuna*, Pers. *karbaš*, etc.) of his first citation means 'lizard', not 'cat'.¹ (2) That a reference in the Coptic Psalm-Book² to the Manichaean Prince of Darkness as 'this lion-faced dragon' fits 'perfectly' with the Mithraic divinity. Here again I venture to think that the case is pressed a little too warmly. In the first place, even in this reference the correspondence is not exact, since the Mithraic statue has a human body encircled by a snake, and not a dragon's. Secondly, this brief poetic allusion cannot be given validity over the detailed descriptions of the Manichaean Ahriman in the *Kephalaia* and *Fihrist*³; nor am I convinced that the lion and dragon 'standing at the upper and lower ends of the infernal kingdom' can be used as a kind of shorthand to 'sum up the nature of the King of Darkness' (p. 239). Features of the Mithraic statue such as the key or keys, or the radiate nimbus of the Oxyrynchos relief, seem more readily explicable in a statue of Time than in one of the Devil; and there is surely a touch of special pleading in the argument that 'Ahriman, as master of this world, would inevitably become adorned with the Signs of the Zodiac and the Planets' (*Zurwān*, ix). One misses in this connexion a reference to Pettazzoni's study 'The monstrous figure of Time in Mithraism',⁴ which traces an iconographical development of the Mithraic statue from Egyptian tradition, in particular from the type of the Bes Pantheos; or one to the studies of the Luristan bronze held to show all the features of the Mithraic statue, and hence to provide a prototype for it on Iranian soil from prehistoric times.⁵ In a recent article⁶ Duchesne-Guillemin has accepted Pettazzoni's conclusions, but thinks they can be reconciled with the identification of the figure with Ahriman. He offers in this article further evidence for this identification, notably that of the York votive tablet; the fact that, in such cases as can be judged, the statue was placed

¹ This fact I learnt as a student from Professor Henning, who pointed out at the time the many corruptions undergone by the word in Pahlavi and Persian. He has since cited in print the well-preserved Xwarezmian form *karbun* (see his *Zoroaster*, 45). Pahlavi natural history is notoriously imprecise, but the following passage (*Gt.Bd.*, 43.4 ff.) serves as a slight counter-balance to Professor Zaehner's citation, placing the lizard as it does in unexceptionable company: *a'on astōmand aziš be ambōsūd hēnd xrafstar i gazāg i wišōmand, čē'ōn aš ud mār ud gazdum ud karbiš ud kašawa ud wazag* 'Thus there came into bodily existence through him the stinging and poisonous reptiles, such as dragon and snake and scorpion and lizard and tortoise and frog'. The Pahlavi gloss to Av. *kahrpuna*, cited by Zaehner, appears to suggest rather charmingly a lizard with lifted head.

² Allberry, p. 57, l. 18.

³ See Polotsky, *Abriss des manichäischen Systems*, Pauly-Wissowa, Supplbd. vi, 250. It was with the detailed description of the Manichaean demon that Duchesne-Guillemin (loc. cit.) first tentatively compared the Mithraic figure.

⁴ See R. Pettazzoni, *Essays on the history of religions*, transl. H. J. Rose, Leiden, 1954, 180-92; the original paper was published in *L'Antiquité Classique*, xviii, 1949, 265-77.

⁵ See, most recently, A. Alföldi, 'Der iranische Weltreise auf archäologischen Denkmälern', *Jahrbuch der Schweizerischen Gesellschaft für Urgeschichte*, xl, 1949-50, 17-34.

⁶ 'Ahriman et le dieu suprême dans les mystères de Mithra', *Numen*, ii, 1955, 190-5; see now further, by the same author, 'Le Zervanisme et les manuscrits de la Mer Morte', *Indo-Iranian Journal*, I, 1, 1957, 96-9.

outside the adyton ; and the witness of the evil appearance of the statue itself.¹ Of this last point it may be said that the statue is not invariably horrific. The human-headed ones at Mérida and Modena are calm and beautiful, and some of those with beast-heads are gentle and comely enough, for example the one from Castel Gandolfo. The horrific ones can perhaps be explained as representing Time in its menacing aspect ; and it is possibly easier to accept many horrific statues of Time than one or two beautiful ones of the Devil. But the matter is clearly a complicated one, and I have no wish to offer an opinion of my own, but merely to indicate where some of the evidence put forward seems to me a little weak.

The new theories briefly discussed here by no means exhaust the rich material gathered by Professor Zaehner in the first part of his book, for which students of Iranian matters must remain in his debt. The second part of the work is also assured of a warm welcome. It is most useful to have in one volume 'the relevant texts from all sources' (p. 6). The Pahlavi texts, which take up most of part II, are rendered in a natural and lucid English attractive to read, and the translations shed light on some dark places. Details could be argued for almost every paragraph, but that arises largely from the nature of the 'maddening original' (p. 6).

If I may venture to sum up my own views on this important book, they are that where the author has consolidated and enriched established interpretations, he has done a most valuable work ; but that where he has most consciously introduced new matter, he has been perhaps less fortunate in his findings. To adopt his own simile, therefore (p. 265), I think that some of the scaffolding in his 'house of Time' *should* be taken down again. Should he chance to agree, one can but earnestly hope that he will himself engage in the task of reconstruction, as he has equipped himself so outstandingly in this subject. Even if he does no more for Zurvanism, however, we shall remain in his debt.

¹ Perhaps I may take this opportunity to express my personal gratitude to Professor Zaehner for his kindness, during the VIIIth Congress for the History of Religions, in taking me, despite pressure of time, to see the terrifying statues in the Vatican Museum. During this Congress we shared the privilege, with Professor Duchesne-Guillemin, of being shown the mithraeum of St. Prisca by its excavator, Dr. van Essen. The unique central statue here has been identified as Okeanos-Coelus, hence Ohrmazd (see Duchesne-Guillemin, *Numen*, II, 1955, 195).